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The Friends and The Feds

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In February 1922, an FBI agent in Philadelphia sent a confidential and rather plaintive memorandum to his superior in Washington about the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), which had been accused of being used "by anarchistic organizations as a medium for sending their funds for the relief of Soviet Russia":

"[It] is the same as the one known as the Friends Society, which is commonly known as the Quakers. In checking up on almost all of the officers of the executive committee it was found that they are all persons of high standing in commercial and social circles, many of whom are devoting their time, without monetary gain, in the Committee's undertaking to help the famine-stricken people of Soviet Russia and in their other philanthropic undertakings. This Committee, which is known to be a nonpolitical organization or society, has accepted and is accepting funds from any organization or individuals, whether radicals or not, but they do not allow anyone, no matter how big the contribution may be, to invoke or serve their political aims or propaganda through the Friends Committee."

This pattern—an allegation that the AFSC is being "used" by a subversive element, followed by an investigation which establishes that it is a "sincere pacifist organization"—runs through the mountains of files the Quaker organization has amassed under the amended Freedom of Information Act of 1975, which gives individuals and organizations limited access to the files kept on them by the FBI, CIA, and similar Government organizations.

Altogether, to date, the AFSC has received almost 1,700 pages from ten Government agencies, including 553 pages from the FBI, about 230 from the Air Force, 251 from the CIA, 88 from the Navy, 158 from the Internal Revenue Service, 66 from the Secret Service, and 335 from the State Department. The Army says it has destroyed all its files, as it was ordered to do, but copies keep showing up in other collections. The Defense Intelligence Agency has sent only one document, so heavily censored

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Agency has provided
learned from its CIA
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Some of this material....

AFSC agreed, under protest, to pay photocopying charges. Some was released after the AFSC successfully appealed a denial of information. More may be made available only after legal action. The most interesting information—dealing, for example, with the planting of informers, will probably never be released. But the record clearly establishes more than fifty years of Government surveillance, including wiretapping, the opening of mail, and outright spying. To read through the pages and pages of resulting reports is to be overwhelmed by the sheer inefficiency and duplication of effort within the vast surveillance network just now coming to light.

In the 251 pages the AFSC has received so far from the CIA, eighty-six are a prepublication draft of a booklet, *Experiment without Precedent*, written by eleven representatives of the AFSC who spent three weeks in the People's Republic of China in May 1972, two months after Richard M. Nixon's famous visit. There was nothing startling, let alone confidential, in the draft, which was, of course, made public a few weeks later. Yet the CIA saw fit to obtain the draft at taxpayer expense, to copy and file it at taxpayer expense, and to analyze it at taxpayer expense.

Perhaps half of the material the AFSC has received from various Government agencies under the Freedom of Information Act is of a similar nature—news releases, copies of correspondence, copies of publications, reports of public meetings. The AFSC has always made it a point to be an open, public organization; it has no secrets to be spied out. Yet Government agencies have gone to great lengths to attend and report on open meetings, to read and copy news releases, to intercept the mail.

For years the New England regional office of the AFSC sponsored an annual seminar on international relations, called the Avon Institute. FBI files reveal that in 1954 at least three informants, "T-3," "T-4," and "T-5," infiltrated this meeting: "T-5 (of known reliability) advised that (name deleted) in one of his talks at the seminar at Avon Old Farms School in June of 1954 expressed the opinion that U.S. big business was the cause of the trouble in Guatemala because big businesses wanted to keep their interest alive in that country. He also stated that the United States, and other western powers, should keep out of Indochina affairs."

The Government files provide ample proof that the mail of AFSC staff members has frequently been opened. In 1943, an AFSC staff couple vacationing at a state park in West Virginia received some letters from the Philadelphia office regarding applications from college students to work as peace volunteers. There was also a letter from a Nisei who hoped she would be able to leave a relocation center to continue her education. A suspicious local resident opened the mail and forwarded its content to the FBI. As a result of this complaint, the Philadelphia bureau of the

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